Abstract

This dissertation is an empirically responsive philosophical exploration into the incorporation of technological tools within a framework comprising the structures of experience laid out in the early phenomenological tradition and an analysis of agency drawing from the analytical tradition.

Technological tools have become so deeply integrated in our lives that they function like a part of us, transforming what we feel we can do and even who we are. Although new spaces of autonomous agency have been opened up, since the inner workings of technological tools can remain invisible, we risk diminishing our own capacities.

Since we are fundamentally embedded in the world, we cannot understand ourselves without reference to the world and we cannot understand the world without reference to the way we are. The uniqueness involved in our use of technological tools grows out of a more primordial uniqueness that makes technological tool use possible and sets us apart from our closest evolutionary relatives. Several animals extend their physical influence on the environment by means of tools. We humans, however, use tools to extend our cognitive abilities as well. And since the computer is the most universal human tool, which can be put to sensorimotor and cognitive purposes alike, we take the computer to be the prototypical technological tool.

Our picture of the structures of experience is inscribed in a transcendental approach which asks about the conditions that make experience possible. For Heidegger the scope of the transcendental question is not restricted to the conditions of cognitive experience or even intentionality. Rather, it is concerned with our very openness to Being. To complement Heidegger's existential analytic, we consider Merleau-Ponty's account of a specifically corporeal being-in-the-world and Sartre's interpretation of the other.

We proceed from conditions of possibility to the structures of experience more immediately involved in intentionality by showing first how we build on the basic structures of experience to make ever-expanding constellations of experience possible and second how these experiential possibilities are constrained by agency.

Turning to the resources of analytic philosophy, we put together an account of agency applicable to tool-use, taking a close look at John Searle's account of intentionality.

Having established an analytical framework for the phenomenological integration of tools within an account of agency, we apply the framework to computer-driven tool use.

We then posit autonomy as our pivotal evaluative criterion and examine how our analytical framework might be applied to two concrete aspects of our subject today – technologically mediated privacy and technologically mediated agency – with the aim of assessing how autonomy might be fostered or diminished.

To conclude, we consider possible directions of future research, considering an investigation, using the tools laid out in the dissertation, into how the incorporation of computer-driven technological tools might distort the fabric of the Lifeworld along phenomenological vectors of constitution.

Keywords: technology, technological tools, phenomenology, structures of experience, agency, basic actions, intentions in action, complexity, tools, Internet, computer, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, John Searle, Jean-Paul Sartre, reversibility, incorporation, embodiment, habit, deviant causation, wayward causation, deviance, waywardness, privacy, the other, autonomy